तव कथामृतं तप्तजीवनम्
tava kathāmṛtaṁ tapta-jīvanam

Sri Krishna Kathamrita
Bindu

Issue No. 83 *Fortnightly email mini-magazine from Gopal Jiu Publications*
28 July 2004 *Śrī Padminī Ekādaśī*, 11 *Puruṣottama-adhika-māsa*, 518 *Gaurābda* Circulation 1,540

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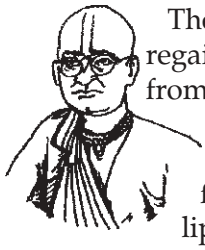
The Chanters of the Kirtan of Lord Hari

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada



The *sādhu* helps the fallen *jīva* to regain his natural state of freedom from sin, by the constant service of bringing about the descent of transcendental sound in the form of words uttered by his lips and the *mahāprasāda* in the shape of food that is offered by him to the Lord. The sound uttered by the *sādhu* and the *mahāprasāda* are not things of this world. They are not identical with ordinary sound or ordinary food which are only means for the gratification of our sensuous appetites. The word of God and *mahāprasāda* cannot be enjoyed, or in other words cannot be used for the gratification of the senses, because they are spiritual. Those who enjoy the *kīrtana*, or any spiritual discourse, or eat the *mahāprasāda* for appeasing hunger or for gratification of the palate are guilty of sacrilegious acts which serve only to prolong the state of sin and ignorance. This is the greatest possible calamity that can befall the human soul. The *kīrtana* of Hari is the constant and natural function of all the faculties of the *jīva* soul in the state of it's freedom from all affinities with this changeable world. Because the absolute truth is identical with Hari, Hari has to be served exclusively, constantly, and by all the faculties of the soul. The only function of the voice is to chant the *kīrtana* of Hari, which is identical with and inseparable from the simultaneous service of Hari by all the other senses. One who does not employ his voice constantly and exclusively in chanting the *kīrtana* of Hari has no access to the service of Hari by any other faculty.

The *kīrtana* of Hari has therefore to be chanted by being humbler than a blade of grass. There can be no trace of worldly vanity. There can be no seeking after any worldly advantage. The only object should be to please Lord Hari.

The absolute truth is a living person and not an abstract principle. He has the power of communicating His commands to us and expressing His approval and disapproval of our activities. No one can understand His command who does not fully submit to Him.

The absolute truth is not anything limited or partial; neither can it be divided. It is not dependent on any condition except itself. It is always one and the same. Listening to or

next column ☞

chanting of it is always and necessarily beneficial, being the natural function of the soul. Any other view of its nature will stand in the way of that perfect humility, the outcome of absolute submission which is the indispensable condition of its realization.

A chanter of the *kīrtana* of Hari is necessarily the uncompromising enemy of worldliness and hypocrisy. As a chanter of the *kīrtana* of Hari, it is his constant function to dispel all misconceptions by the preaching of the truth in a most unambiguous form, without any influence of person, place or time. That form has to be adopted which is least likely to be misunderstood. It is his bounden duty to oppose any person who tries to deceive and harm himself or other people by misrepresenting the truth either due to malice or genuine misunderstanding. This will be possible if the chanter of *kīrtana* is always prepared to submit to be trodden on by thoughtless people if any discomfort to himself will enable him to do good to his persecutors by chanting the truth in the most unambiguous manner. If he is unwilling to chant the *kīrtana* under all circumstances due to consideration of self-respect or personal discomfort, then he is unfit to be a preacher of the absolute truth. Humility implies perfect submission to the truth and no sympathy for untruth. A person who entertains any partiality for untruth is unfit to chant the *kīrtana* of Hari. Any clinging to untruth is opposed to the principle of humility born of absolute submission to the truth.

Those who serve the truth at all times, by means of all their faculties, and have no hankering for the trivialities of this world, are always necessarily free from malice born of competing worldliness; and are therefore fit to admonish those who are actively engaged in harming themselves and others by the method of opposing or misrepresenting the truth in order to attain the rewards of such a policy in the shape of a perpetuation of the state of misery and ignorance. The method which is employed by the servant of the good preceptor for preventing such misrepresentation of the truth is a part and parcel of the truth itself. It may not always be pleasing to the diseased susceptibilities of deluded minds, and may even be denounced by them as a malicious act with which they are only too familiar, but the words of truth from the lips of a loyal and humble servant of Hari possess such beneficent power that all effort to suppress or obstruct them only serves to vindicate to impartial minds the necessity of complete submission to the absolute truth as the only cure of the disease of worldliness. Humility that is employed in the unambiguous service of the truth is necessarily and qualitatively different from its perverted prototype, which is practiced by the cunning people of this world for gaining their worldly ends. The professors of pseudo-humility have reason to be afraid of the preachings of the servants of Hari (those whose duty it is to expose the enormous possibility of mischief possessed by the many forms of so-called spirituality), when they are taken to task for serving the untruth. ❀

Making the Temple Spiritually Perfect

By His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness now has its world center in Nabadwip, Mayapur. The managers of this center should see that twenty-four hours a day there is chanting of the holy names of the Hare Krishna *mahā-mantra*, with the addition of *haraye namaḥ, kṛṣṇa yādavāya namaḥ*, for this song was a favorite of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's. But all such *saṅkīrtana* must be preceded by the chanting of the holy names of the five tattvas — *śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu-nityānanda śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda*. We are already accustomed to chant these two mantras — *śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu-nityānanda śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda* and *hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare, hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare*. Now, after these, the other two lines — namely, *haraye namaḥ, kṛṣṇa yādavāya namaḥ/ gopāla govinda rāma śrī-madhusūdana* — should be added, especially in Mayapur. Chanting of these six lines should go on so perfectly well that no one there hears any vibration other than the chanting of the holy names of the Lord. That will make the center spiritually all-perfect. ❀

— Purport to *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta ādi* 17.123

Glories of the Mridanga Drum

Adapted from Srila Narahari Chakravarti Thakur's Śrī Bhakti-ratnākara, Chapter 5, Texts 3109-3133

Musical instruments (*vādya)* are of four kinds: *tata* (stringed instruments), *ānaddham* (drums), *śuṣira* (wind instruments), and *ghana* (percussion instruments). *Tata* instruments include the *vīṇā; ānaddha* instruments include the *muraja; śuṣira* instruments include the flute; and *ghana* instruments include the bell. It is said:

na vādyena vinā yasmād gītaṁ tālaś ca śobhate

Without instrumental music, there is no beauty in song and rhythm.

The *Śrī Sangīta-darpaṇa* describes: *ānaddhe mardalaḥ śreṣṭha* — The *mardala* [another name for the *mṛdanga*] is the best of drums. Sometimes the *mṛdanga* is made from wood, and sometimes it is made from clay. The sound of the *mrdanga* is most auspicious and charming. It enhances the beauty of all other instruments. In *Śrī Saṅgīta-dāmodara* it is said:

mṛttikā-nirmitāś caiva mṛdaṅgāḥ parikīrtitāḥ
evaṁ mardalakaḥ proktaḥ sarva-vādyottamottamaḥ

The *mardala* is said to be the best of all musical instruments. When it is made of clay, the *mardala* is called the *mṛdaṅga*.

madhyadeśe mṛdaṅgasya brahmā vasati sarvadā
yathā tiṣṭhanti tal-loke devā atrāpi saṁsthitāḥ
sarva-deva-mayo yasmān mṛdaṅgaḥ sarva-maṅgalaḥ

Lord Brahma is always situated in the *mṛdaṅga's* middle part. The demigods who reside in Brahma's planet are also situated there. Because all the demigods reside within it, the *mṛdaṅga* is all-auspicious.

mṛdaṅga-nirmāṇa vādya-bhedādi lakṣaṇa
vividha prakāre varṇe saṅgīta-jña-gaṇa

Music scholars say the *mṛdaṅga* and other musical instruments were created from the letters of the alphabet.

It is said:

dhīro vādya-viśāradaḥ pravacanaḥ pāṭākṣara-vyañjakas
tālābhyāsa-ratā samasta-gamaka-prauḍha-prakāśa-kṣamaḥ
nānā-vādya-vivarta-nartana-paṭuḥ svabhyasta-gīta-kramaḥ
santuṣṭo sukha-vādako drutakaro mārdaṅgikaḥ kīrtitaḥ

A *mṛdaṅga* player should be sober, well-versed in instrumental techniques, eloquent, expert in the beats (*tālas*) given in sequences of syllables (*bolas*), able to play all the sounds (*gamakas)*, expert in accompanying dance performances and songs, cheerful, easily proficient in playing his instrument, and quick-fingered. ❀

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Sri Mridanga Pranama Mantra

mṛdaṅga brahma-rūpāya lavaṇaṁ rasa-mādhurī
sahasra guṇa saṁyuktaṁ mṛdaṅgāya namo namaḥ

The *mṛdaṅga* is the very form of transcendental gracefulness and sweet enchantment. It has a thousand different qualities. I bow down again and again to the *mṛdaṅga* drum. ❀

Musical Instruments of Sankirtan

From "Ancient Sanskrit Verses Quoted in* Bhava-sindhu-taraṇī" *by Sri Dasarath Suta Das

Some of the ingredients of *saṅkīrtana* are *khol* or *mṛdaṅga* (clay drum), *karatāla* (hand cymbals), *shingā* or *vishāna* (horn), *kara-tālī* (clapping of the hands), *nṛtya* (dancing), and *luṭhana* (rolling on the ground). The reasons these items are essential will be systematically described as follows:

Mṛdaṅga
Clay Drum

The *mṛdaṅga* speaks, "*dhik tān, dhik tān, dhig e tān." Pandits* of ancient times have ascertained the message that the *mṛdaṅga* is conveying when it makes this sound, as follows:

yeṣāṁ śrīmad yaśodā-suta pada kamale nāsti bhaktir narāṇāṁ
yeṣām ābhīra-kanyā-priya-guṇa-kathane nānuraktā rasa-jñā
yeṣāṁ śrī kṛṣṇa-līlā-lalita-guṇa-kathā sādaro naiva karṇe
dhik tān, dhik tān, dhig e tān kathayati nitarāṁ kīrtana-stho mrdaṅgaḥ

To those people who have no devotion for the lotus feet of Srimad Yasoda-suta;
To those whose tongues are not lovingly attached to speaking of the transcendental qualities of the beloved of the cowherd girls;
To those whose ears are not fond of hearing the *kathā* of the charming qualities of Śrī Krishna's divine pastimes;

"Fie unto them! Fie unto them!! Fie unto them!!!" Thus speaks the *mṛdaṅga* during *kirtana*.

It is understood that during *kīrtana*, when this *bol* is heard being spoken by the *mṛdaṅga*, such persons are being condemned, whereas others are being engaged in *hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana*. By the use of the *mṛdaṅga*, this benefit is achieved.

Karatāla
Hand Cymbals

During *saṅkīrtana*, the *karatālas* ring out their famous "one-two-three" rhythm, which conveys the following three messages to the devotees:

mṛtyuṁ jayeyaṁ śamanaṁ jayeyaṁ
tat-kiṅkarāṁs cāpi sukhaṁ jayeyam
śrutveti dūrāt kara-tāla-śabdaṁ
saṅkīrtakaṁ te khalu nopayānti

"I will be victorious over death, I will be victorious over Yamaraj, and I will very happily be victorious over all his servants!" — By hearing this sound of the *karatālas* from afar, these three (death, Yamaraj, and his servants) certainly do not come anywhere near the performers of the *kīrtana*.

Vishāṇa
Horn

nāma-saṅkīrtanodbhūta-bhakti-dhmāta-mano-malaḥ
apasāryeta phut-kārair viṣāna-nala-vartmanā

When devotion arises during *nāma-saṅkīrtana*, it acts like a fire to burn to ashes the impurities within the mind. Thereafter, the auspicious horn blasts away this residue by the sound issuing forth from the path of its tube.

Kara-tālī
Clapping the Hands

dehāga-kṛta-gehāni pāpa-pakṣi-kulāny aho!
apasārayituṁ śaśvat kara-tālī pradīyate

Alas! Residing in the tree of the body are certainly many birds of sin. But they are undoubtedly chased away by the clapping of the hands during *kīrtana*.

Nṛtya and Luṭhana
Dancing and Rolling on the Ground

etāvanti dināni karma-nirato buddhyā svayāyāpayaṁ
dūre cāsmi tato jagat-pitur aho! duḥkhañ ca nāpāgamat
nṛtyāmy adya tad-unnayan bhuja-yugaṁ vālāyamānaḥ punaḥ
krandaṁś cāpi luthāmi māṁ karuṇayā kroḍe sa karyān na vā

Alas! I have passed so many days engaged in fruitive activities that are bound by *karma*, acting according to my own intelligence. By that, I have fallen far away from the father of the universe and I have not been able to put an end to my misery. Therefore, today I behave as a child and dance with abandon as I raise my arms aloft, then I cry and roll about in the dust. Just see! Will He not be merciful and take me onto His own lap?

Small children are prone to beg for attention from their fathers: A child puts his arms up in the air, dances around, and calls out to the father, who responds by taking the child into his lap and fondling him lovingly. But if the father does not respond right away, the child cries and rolls on the ground. Seeing this is intolerable for the kind father, who certainly picks the child up. In this mood, dancing and rolling on the ground are an integral part of the performance of *saṅkīrtana*, and are meant to petition the favor of the all-merciful Lord, the supreme father. Therefore, there is no doubt that by these practices one attains special benefit.

— *Rādhā-Krishna Nectar*. Nectar Books (http://www.nectarbooks.com). Union City, Georgia, USA. 1992. pages 122-123.

Sri Krishna Kathamrita Bindu

A free bi-monthly service provided by:
Gopal Jiu Publications
c/o Sri Krishna Balarama Mandir
National Highway No. 5, IRC Village
Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India, 751015
Phone: (0674) 2553250, 2557026
Email: katha@gopaljiu.org
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Subscriptions: minimag@gopaljiu.org

Gopal Jiu Publications is a branch of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Founder-Acharya His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

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